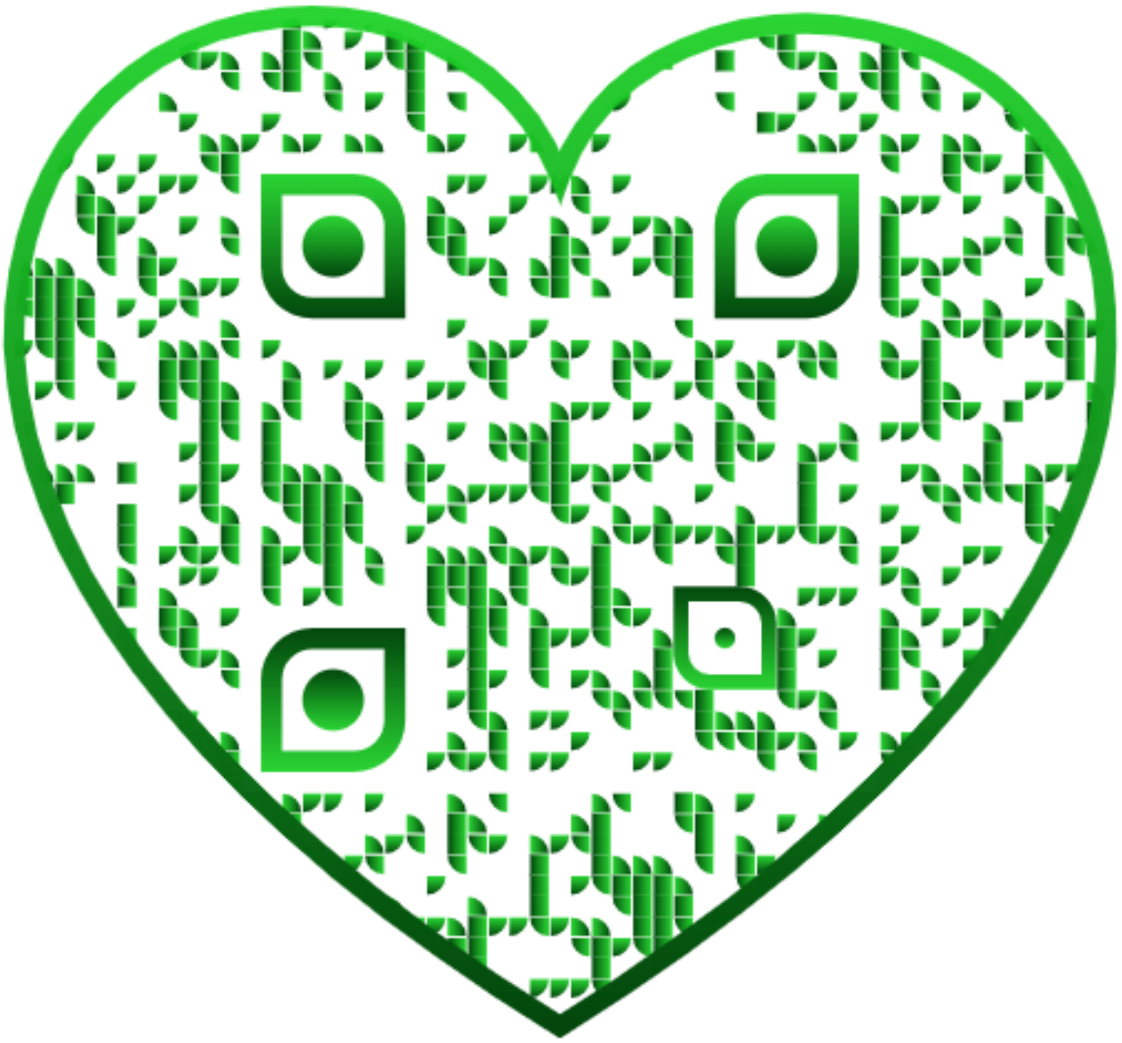
DAY ON THE GREEN

A Green Day Lesson

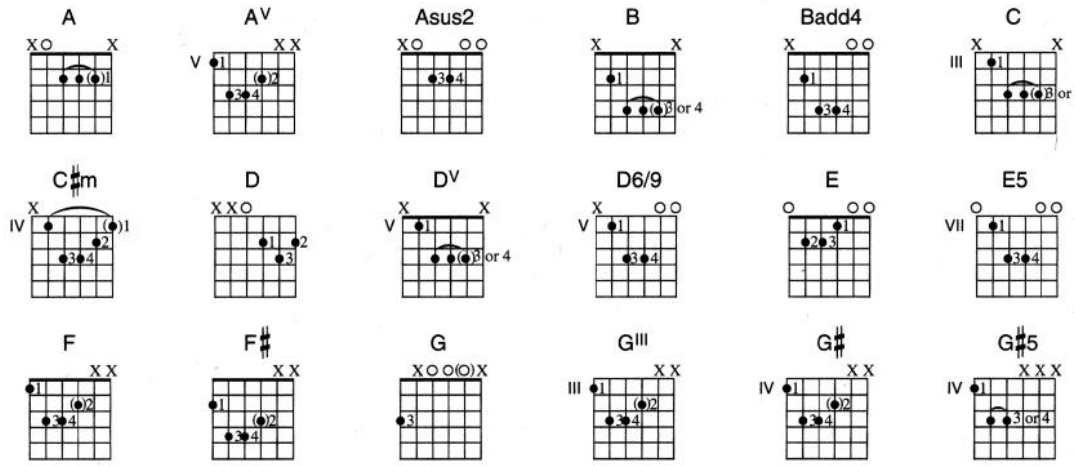
By Jesse Gress

Nobody plays rhythm like Pete Townshend, except maybe ... Green Day's Billie Joe?!! Before condemning this declaration as way too rash, commit an hour or so to digesting the following Green Day rhythm guitar primer.

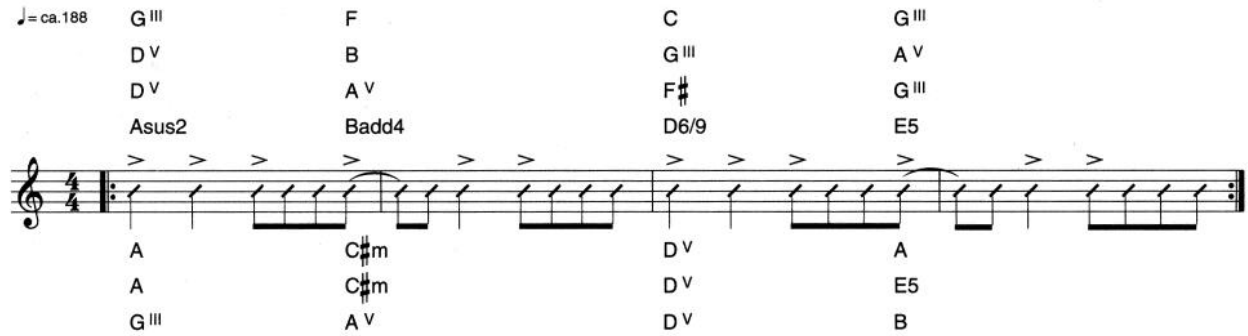
Within this crash course you'll discover evidence of vintage Who and Kinks power pop, Pistols-style bollocks-to-the-wall chordal assaults, and even an occasional nod to Van Halen, all reminiscent of the band's early '90s sound as chronicled on Lookout Records' *1,039/Smoothed Out Slappy Hours* compilation. Sometime between then and 1994's *Dookie*, Green Day engineered a stylistic overhaul that stripped down many of these elements and all but eliminated guitar solos. Their adolescent themes and Beatley harmonies were recast over speedy, fat-sounding chordal riffs that have remained emblematic through the band's current release, *Insomniac*.



One factor has remained constant. Billie Joe's relentless rhythm guitar drives the band. Devoid of vocal melodies, the following stylistic examples may seem generic or derivative, but therein lies the challenge to bring them to life. Think of each as a road map to an exuberant performance. The benefits range from learning the basics or a few new tricks to rediscovering the inherent giddiness in banging out simple chord forms.



Examples 1-6 are notated using slash rhythms. The chord forms are listed alphabetically in the chord library above. **Examples 1a-1g** exploit the same rhythm motif, a Green Day staple found in such songs as "Judge's Daughter," "Why Do You Want Him?" "Only Of You," "Dry Ice," and "I Want To Be Alone." Root motion outlines the progressions V-IV-I-V, I-VI-IV-V, I-V-III-IV, I-II-IV-V, I-III-IV-I, I-III-IV-V, and IV-V-I-VI respectively.



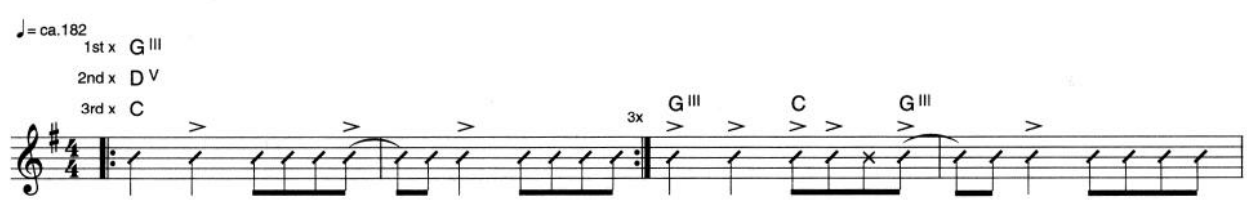
Ex. 2a features the same rhythm with twice the duration (two bars) for each chord. The slight rhythmic alteration in **Ex. 2b** outlines a III-I-V progression with a neutered (no 3rd) III chord (*G♯5*).

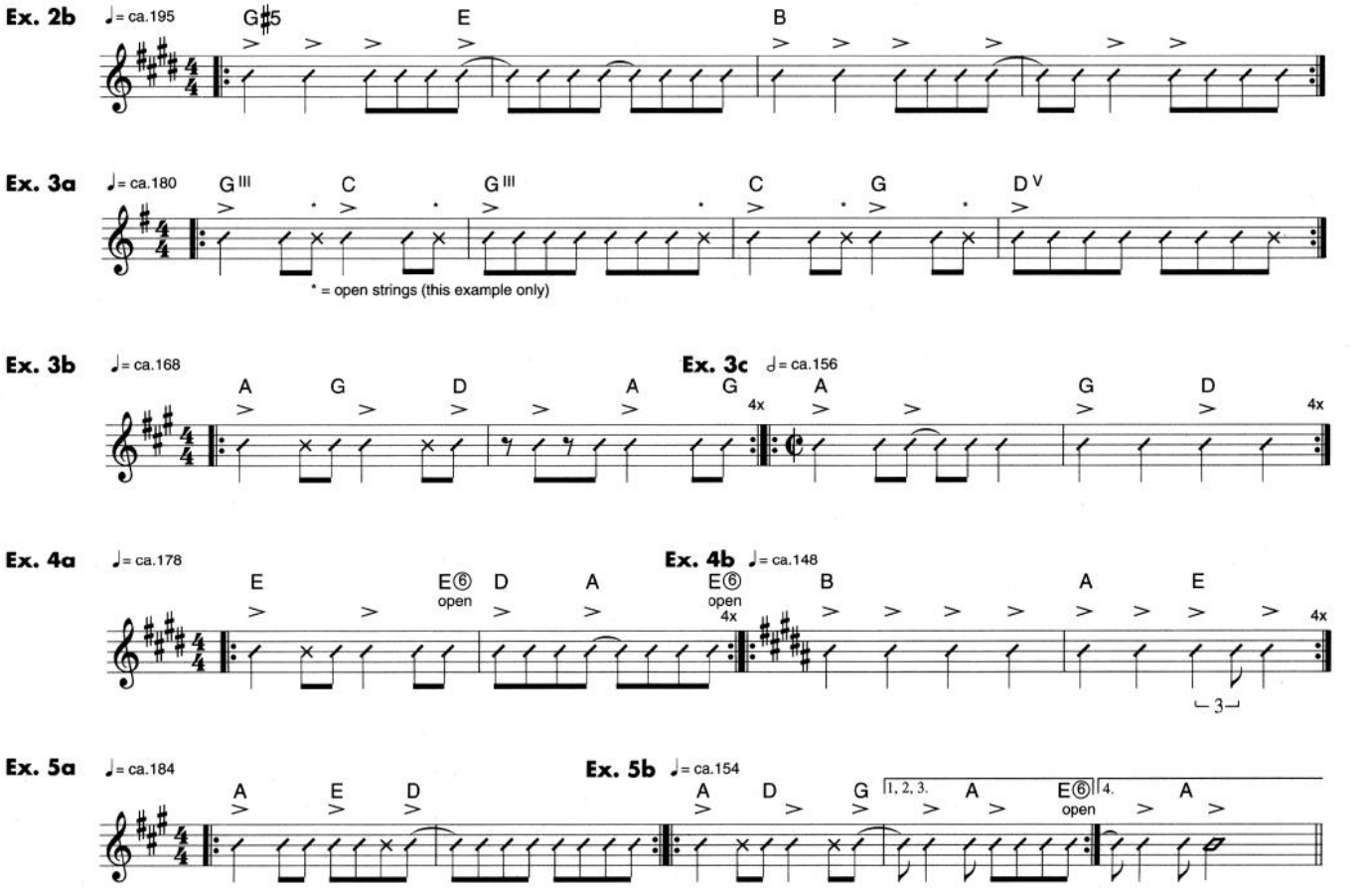
Typical of a Billie Joe "chord solo," **Ex. 3a** offers a look at open passing chords, those naturally occurring open strings that sound en route to the next chord. Apply the concept to other examples as you see fit.

The "X" noteheads in the Townshend-esque power-chord riffs of **Examples 3b** and **3c** indicate muted, not open, strings as in the previous example. Both use I-♭VII-IV progressions, another Green Day hallmark.

Subtle rhythmic variations shape the I-♭VII-IV riff in **Ex. 4a**. **Ex. 4b** transposes the progression to *B* with a rare swing-8th injection.

The Who-ish **Ex. 5a** is a cranked-up I-V-IV figure, while **Ex. 5b** serves up a syncopated I-IV-♭VII-I.

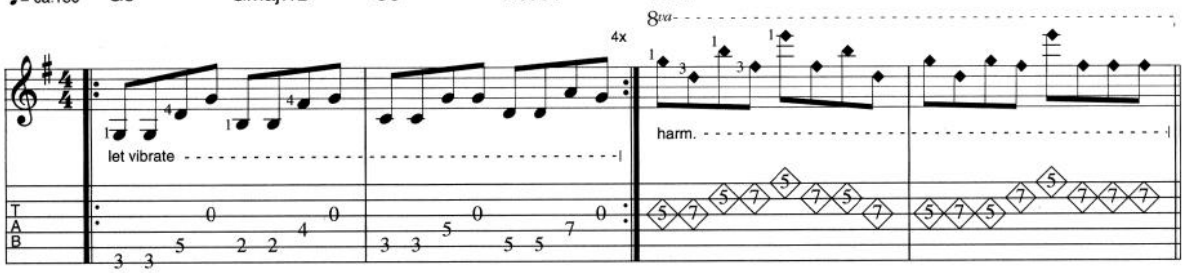




The 4-bar phrase in **Ex. 6a** chugs solidly on the I except for the brief ♭VII-IV punctuation in bar 3. Play the "X" noteheads in **Ex. 6b** as either muted or open strings. Note the major III chord (*G♯*) in the I-III-IV progression. **Ex. 6c** introduces a rarity in Green Day music: rests. The open spaces between syncopated chords build plenty of rhythmic tension before resolving to straight-ahead eighth-notes in bar 4.

Lest you think that all Billie Joe does is pound out chords, consider **Ex. 7**, reminiscent of circa 1990 GD. Arpeggiating the root/5 chords against a droning open *B* string creates expanded harmonies. Top this off with the following flurry of 5th- and 7th-fret harmonies and you'll swear you can smell Van Halen nearby.

Ex. 7 ♩= ca.180 G5 Gmaj7/B C5 Dsus4 N.C.

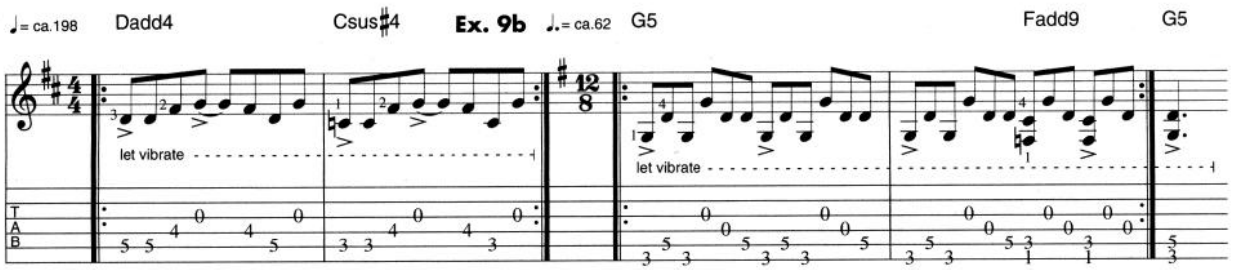


Arpeggiated chordal figures were much more prominent in Green Day's earlier sound. **Ex. 8** presents two more BJ-approved open string voicings: *Asus2* and the eerie *F♯add4*. Adding the open *E* creates *F♯7add4*. Try it.

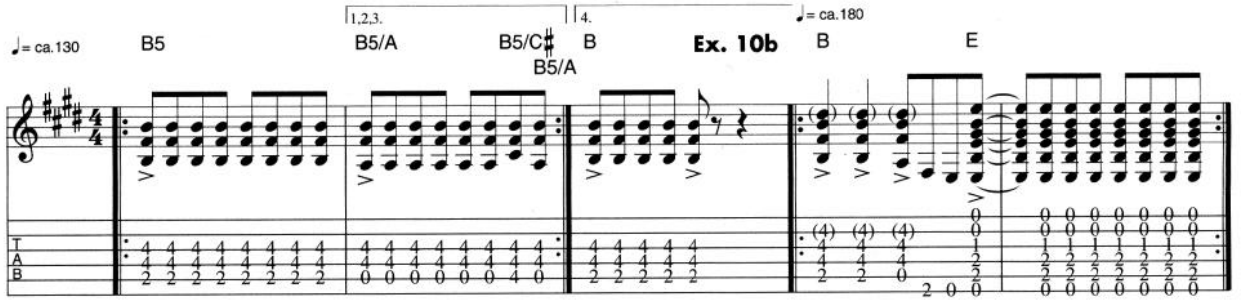
Examine the two single-note riffs derived from I-♭VII progressions in **Examples 9a** and **9b**. Ex. 9a adds a 4 to the I and a ♯4 to the ♭VII. The 12/8 feel and ominous tonality in Ex. 9b impart a grungy mood.

Ex. 8 ♩= ca.198 Asus2 F♯add4

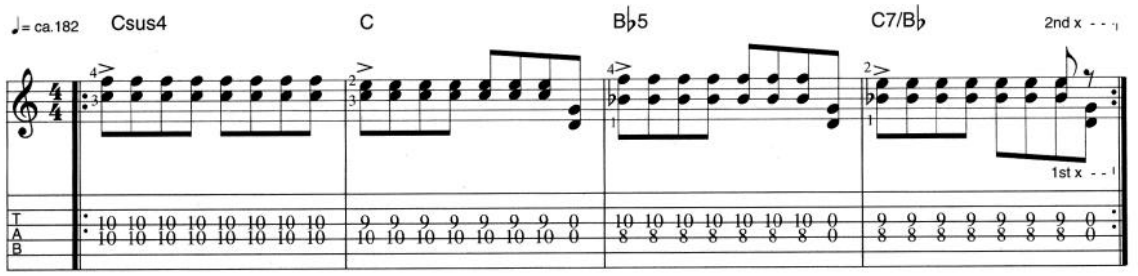
Ex. 9a ♩= ca.198 Dadd4 Csus♯4 **Ex. 9b** ♩.= ca.62 G5 Fadd9 G5



Ex. 10a ♩= ca.130 B5 B5/A B5/C♯ B5/A B **Ex. 10b** B E



Ex. 11 ♩= ca.182 Csus4 C B♭5 C7/B♭

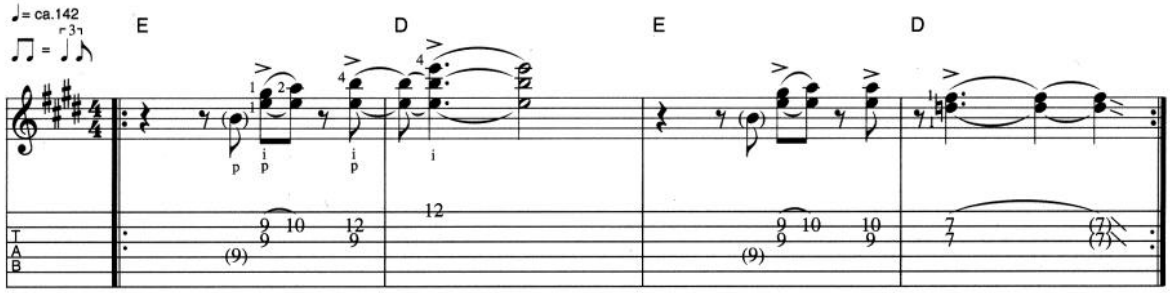


The introductory figure in **Ex. 10a** features a pedal *B5* chord against a moving bass line, another favorite Townshend technique. **Ex. 10b** is a Sex Pistols-style approach to the old V-I.

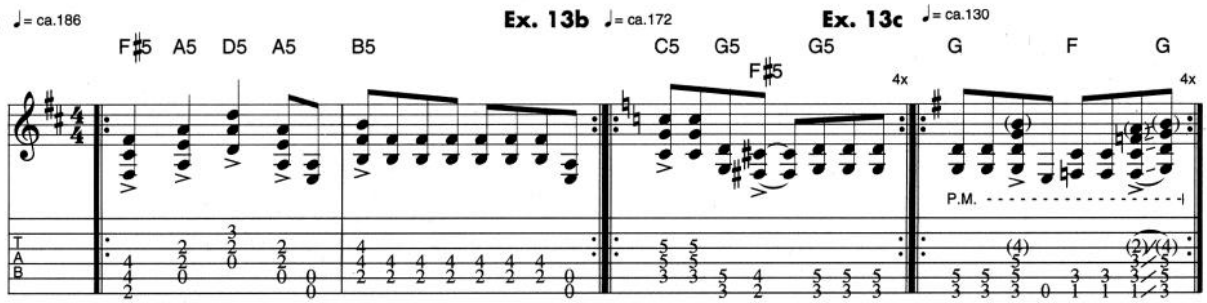
Broken down to diads (double-stops or two-note chords), **Ex. 11** describes the harmonic climate over an extended (two bars each) I-♭VII progression. Fingerstyle double-stops in **Ex. 12** create another Van Halen vibe, again over a I-♭VII movement.

Ex. 13a transforms a *B* pentatonic minor line into a wicked chord riff in which each chord in bar 1 switches string groups. **Examples 13b** and **13c** are killer one-bar hooks outlining I-V-♯IV-V and I-♭VII-I respectively.

Ex. 12 ♩= ca.142



Ex. 13a ♩= ca.186

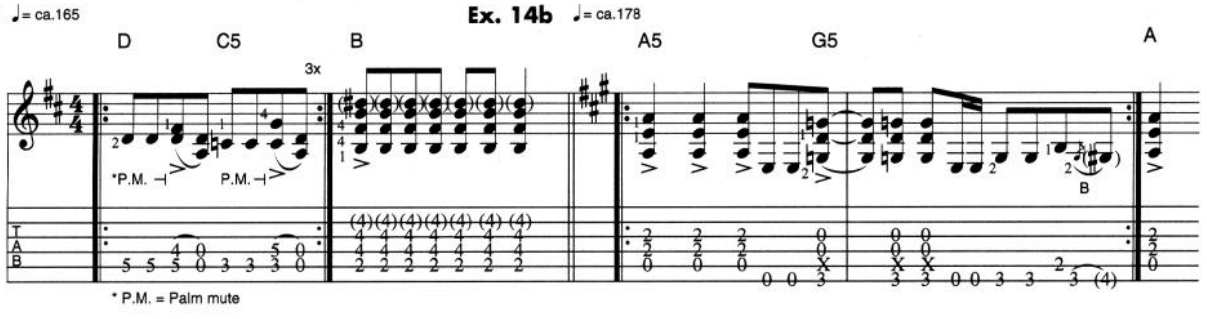


Ex. 13b ♩= ca.172

Ex. 13c ♩= ca.130

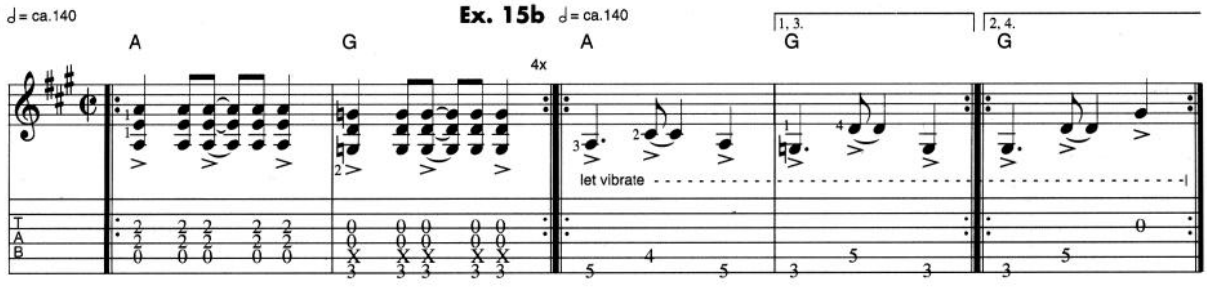
Single notes, double-stops, and chords are combined to various degrees in **Examples 14a** and **14b**. The intense Yardbirds-style rave-up in **Ex. 15a** is recast as a single-note riff in **Ex. 15b**.

Ex. 14a ♩= ca.165



Ex. 14b ♩= ca.178

Ex. 15a ♩= ca.140



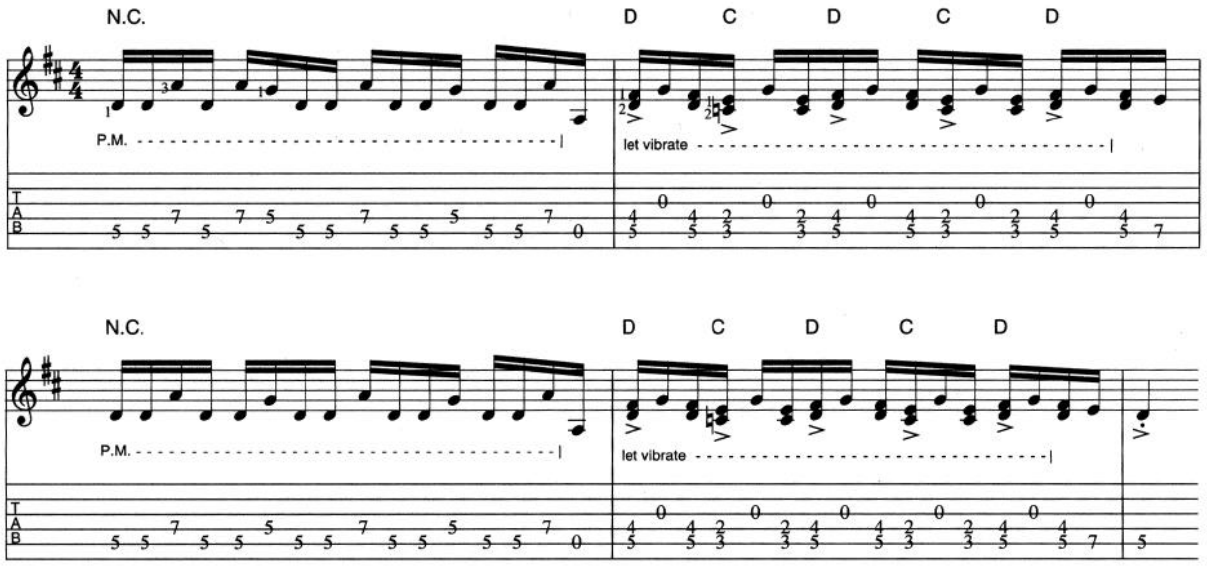
Ex. 15b ♩= ca.140

Ex. 16, an uncharacteristically metal-like intro, alternates single-note phrases with quick double-stops that pit the I and ♭VII chords against an open-*G* drone.

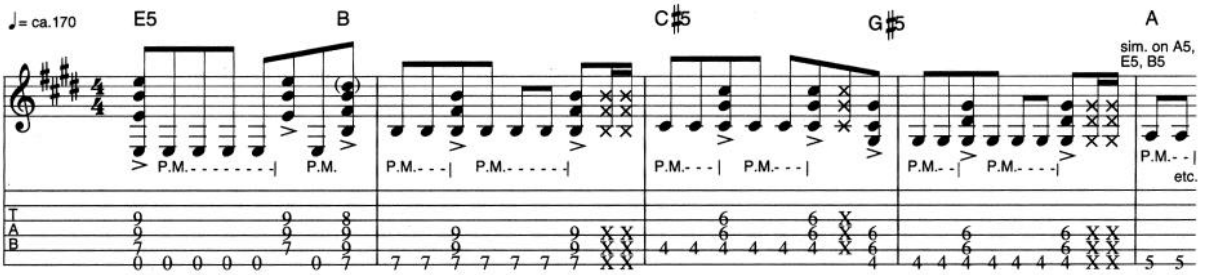
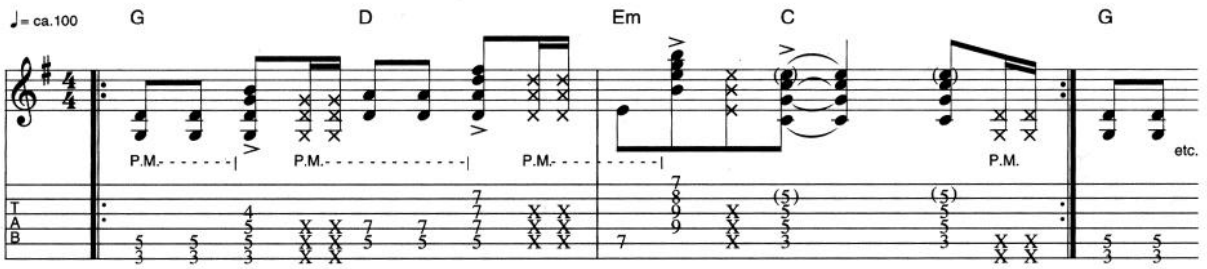
Broken chord figures that contrast muted bass lines with sharp chordal punctuations are among the most recognizable elements of BJ's current style. **Ex. 17** illustrates with a I-V-VI-III-IV-I-V progression, while **Ex. 18** puts a I-V-VI-IV through similar paces.

So there you have it—a cavalcade of chordal cacophony that'd make old rubberwrist proud. Approach each example with unbridled passion, and you too could be Green for a Day! ■

Ex. 16 ♩= ca.95 (D)



Ex. 17 ♩= ca.170



Ex. 18 ♩= ca.100